Hi Ned and Tim
Please find Ch 10 modified by me.
Usually (?) means that I need to check a fact, or feel somewhat uneasy.
There are relatively few.
Best
EB

~~CHAPTER ONE~~

Chapter Ten (3)

Chapter Ten

Sunday is a working day in Israel, and the first sign that June 27, 1976 would be dramatically different did not come until shortly after noon. It was a message from Lod Airport, recently renamed in honor of Ben-Gurion, who had passed away, aged 87, a few weeks after the Yom Kippur War.

Radio contact had been lost with Flight 139, the Air France flight from Tel Aviv to Paris, shortly after its scheduled stopover in Athens.

The message went first to Air Force headquarters, to our operations branch,as well as to the military intelligence, and simultaneously to Chief of Staff Motta

and Rabin, who wasas chairing the main weekly cabinet meeting in Jerusalem. ~~Then, to the chief of staff's office. From there, to military intelligence.~~ And, within a matter of minutes, from the Operations Branch to Sayeret Matkal.

We could have no idea at that point what had caused the loss of communications. In ascending order of seriousness, it might be a simple mechanical malfunction. Engine trouble. A crash. Or, of course, a hijack. But we did know there were roughly 300 passengers and a dozen crew on board. And ever since the Sabena hijacking four years earlier, step-one in our response, if such event happened within less than three hours flight to Israel, had been made automatic: get the sayeret to the airport. If a plane *had* been hijacked, we would at least be ready if the terrorists ordered it flown back to Tel Aviv.

As sayeret fighters began assembling in a hangar at Ben-Gurion, their current commander – my former deputy, Yoni Netanyahu – was deep in the Sinai, preparing an intelligence operation across the canal into Egypt. Mookie Betzer, now his deputy, stepped into the breech. He began briefing the men, and assigning specific roles for a possible hostage-rescue. Though the precedent, and the lessons, of the Sabena operation helped, in at least one

sense, Mookie had a tougher task. Flight 139 was a European-built Airbus, and El Al had none of the planes in its fleet.(to check.EB. I think that by 76’ the Unit had all data, probably even certain training wit many types of airlinersEB.] He was reduced to using photographs(?) in planning how they might best get in, and get the hostages out.

My overall commander was away as well. Motta was in the Negev, observing a major exercise. But his deputy and head of Operations Branch, in a reunion of their partnership from the northern command, was now Kuti Adam. (In fact, he was also running the operations Branch of the GHQ.)~~al command~~. And it was Kuti who, at two o’clock on Sunday afternoon, buzzed through on the intercom and said: “Ehud, come down to my office.”

He didn’t need to tell me why. By now, we knew the plane had been hijacked, renamed “Arafat” and that it was on its way to Libya. I took the stairs. My third-floor office in the *kirya* was one floor above Motta’s, two above Kuti’s. When I got there, he handed me a large, black-and-white aerial photograph: of the international airport in Benina, 10 miles from Mediterranean city of Benghazi on the eastern edge of Libya. “The plane’s heading there,” he said. “Can we do anything?” It was the same

question I'd been asked by Avraham Arnan in 1968, during the first – and only – hijack of an El Al flight, to Algeria. Then, it had taken just an hour for me to come back with an answer. No. Too little knowledge. No resources on the ground. (And no operational experience in boarding a hijacked plane, taking out the hijackers, and freeing their hostages).[EB. This shouldn't stop us. we had to learn how to do it.]

Now, after Sabena, Sayeret Matkal *did* have experience. And in my current job,I knew we do not have any information on it whatsoever. (at least I had ready access to whatever information we *could* get about Benghazi. The airport. (The political, economic and military resources available to the former army colonel who ruled Libya, Muammar Ghaddafy. I also called Mookie, who had by now taken the unit back to Sirkin, to find out what he'd been able to learn about the Airbus). But much as I tried to put together the outline of a rescue operation, the obstacles were still too great. The logistics, alone, in carrying out a hostage rescue a thousand miles away were a daunting problem. And even if we could overcome that, far from being able to count on any local support, we were virtually certain to face opposition from Ghaddafy's troops)]. The chance of

success seemed slim. The risks, enormous. So I returned to Kuti's office and told him, with the present level of info ,we can do nothing. it wouldn't work.

Within a matter of hours, however, that turned out not to matter. Later that night, Flight 139 took off again. And over the course of the following day, Monday, the picture of what was happening got clearer, and changed dramatically. We already knew this was a Palestinian terror operation. The renaming of the airplane erased any doubt of that. But before leaving Libya, the hijackers had freed one of the passengers: an Israeli woman, heavily pregnant, who managed to convince them she was about to go into labor. Fortunately, she had also been born in Britain, and when she produced her UK passport, the Libyans put her on the next flight to London. There, she told us there were four hijackers; two Arabs, and two Europeans. As in Algiers, it was a Popular Front operation, but this time including members of the West German Baader-Meinhof Group. And the plane was heading for the east African state of Uganda. On Monday afternoon, it landed, at Entebbe Airport, 20 miles from the capital city of Kampala, and a couple of hundred yards off the shore of Lake Victoria.

Early Monday evening, Kuti called me down again. He said he'd just heard from Motta, who had been summoned back to Jerusalem from the Negev to attend a government meeting about the hijack crisis, Rabin was the one who wandered, does the Army prepares anything, and demanded to summon Motta. "He ~~He~~ told them there ***is*** a military option," Kuti said, with a wry smile. "Now, all we have to do is find one." Motta was on his way to the *kirya.* He would be back within ~~–~~35 minutes~~the hour~~, and he wanted us to be ready to discuss~~with~~ preliminary thought~~idea~~s when he arrived.

I gave few early warnings to some of my people when , my intercom buzzed again. It was Kuti. He was now in the chief-of-staff's office. Motta had arrived at the gate to the *kirya* ,even earlier than predicted, and wanted to see us both. I got down to the office just before Motta entered andfore he arrived found there Kuti and Yanoush, his deputy., full of energy and obviously ready to set the planning machinery in motion. when Motta entered his office,Kuti (held up a hand of(?) caution, and) led us across the hallway, to the conference room where general staff meetings were held. On the side of the room was an enormous globe. Giving it a spin, he said: "Well, tell me

, Motta. When you told the government we had a military option, did you know where Entebbe *is*?”

Motta did not so much as crack a smile. “We have to find and do something,” he said. “I committed us.” Then, turning to me, he said: “Ehud, I want you to check immediately what can be done there. Take whoever you need from wherever you want in the IDF, or elsewhere, and bring me suggestions by seven o’clock tomorrow morning”

‘Then, by 8am’, he said, ‘we would take what we had to the defense minister, Shimon Peres’.

When I got back to my office, I began by assembling a team, and within ~~barely half-~~an-hour, they were all in my office. My first calls went to two trusted sayeret officers: Mookie, and Amiram Levin. The air force was included as well, through commander Benny Peled’s personal~~top~~ aide, Ido Ambar. *Shayetet 13*, the SEALs, were represented by their commander, Gadi Shefi. We were also joined by a~~two~~ staff officer~~s~~ [EB. Probably not at the first night. There was also a guy from the intelligence. Let me check.EB.]from Dan Shomron’s office, the umbrella command of the paratroopers and infantry, to make sure they are in the picture..

I announced we would be working through the night, a challenge which, if anything, seemed to galvanize everyone. The first thing I stressed was the need to find out anything and everything about the Entebbe Airport, How it looks, how it works? Is it just civilian? Also military? what kind of routines it has, ? what might change? .

–

place the terrorists had landed. Uganda, in common with mmost Third World countries at the time, was no close friend of Israel, but not, to the extent we knew, hostile as well. UBut until its bizarre dictator, Idi Amin, had abruptly (?)changed course in the early 1970s, our relations had been fairly close. Amin himself had been on a militarParachutey training course in Israel. We had sent dozens of officers to help train the Ugandan army. An Israeli construction firm had actually built(?) the new terminal at Entebbe Airport.

We immediately sent someone from the *kirya* to try to get the architectural plans (I cant recall if we really built it.. I'll check)for the Entebbe new terminal. Ido called air force headquarters for a copy of the standard

~~reference on world airports, by the US aviation-information company Jeppesen.~~

~~A~~ A ~~But the~~ real bonus turned out to come from Mookie. He spent several months ~~had been involved~~ in one of our training missions in Uganda, at a special infantry~~taff college~~ school in Jinja, just 70~~a~~ miles or so along the lake shore from Entebbe. He had a feeling of the place, knew the Ugandan Armed forces, and was not really impressed by them, especially at night time..

As Mookie was starting to share lessons we might use in planning a commando operation there entered Ido.

Ido Ambar, bright air force pilot, with practical touch, and the full trust of Benny Peled, the Airforce commander,already brought with him a copy of the standard Pilot's reference on world airports, (by the US aviation-information company) the 'Jeppesen' where you could see a schematic but accurate graphic map of *any* civilian Airport. Moreover he told us that our air force trained the Ugandan air force in Entebbe, for quite long time (to check, 2 years?), and that he already asked a reservist pilot named Salant who trained them, to come in .

~~, my intercom buzzed again. It was Kuti. He was now in the chief-of-staff's office. Motta had arrived at the gate to the *kirya* and wanted to see us both. I got down to~~

~~the office just before he arrived, full of energy and obviously ready to set the planning machinery in motion. Kuti held up a hand of caution, and led us across the hallway, to the conference room where general staff meetings were held. On the side of the room was an enormous globe. Giving it a spin, he said: "OK, be honest, Motta. When you told the government we had a military option, did you know where Entebbe *is*?"~~

~~Motta did not so much as crack a smile. "We have to do something," he said. "I committed us." Then, turning to me, he said: "Ehud, I want you to bring me suggestions by seven o'clock tomorrow morning." Then, he said, the two of us would take what we had to the defense minister, Shimon Peres.~~

~~When I got back to my office, I announced we would be working through the night, a challenge which, if anything, seemed to galvanize everyone.~~ As I'd so often done in Sayeret Matkal, I began by a brainstorming. We were a group of half a dozen most experienced officers in planning and execution of special operations. If something could be done, under these circumstances, it should be found and got its shape by us. But time was short and the thin info, a real challenge. It was clear to me that (as in many previous cases) the two preconditions

for success, in fact even for a viable plan that would be approved, will be: good enough intelligence information, for planning, and the capacity to plan and later execute, almost a personal surprise for the terrorists. We all well remembered Ma'aloth and what might happen when surprise is lost even for a fraction of a minute.

I was trying to reduce the requirements of a successful operation to the bare minimum. The more complicated a plan was, the more which could, and too often did, go wrong. I started with our ultimate goal in Entebbe: to free the hostages. The most direct way to achieve that was to kill, or at least neutralize, the terrorists. I was assuming at this stage – rightly, it turned out – that the passengers had been moved off[EB. Ned, it was probably known from free media, including that thy're probably at the old terminal. EB.] of the plane, most probably into the old terminal, in anticipation of an attempt to negotiate something in return for not simply murdering them. As we got started on putting together a possible plan of operation (Ned, it is not an attack)attack), we received word of the hijackers' demands: the release of several dozen "freedom fighters", including the Japanese terrorist who had killed two dozen people at Lod airport in 1972. (?To no

one's surprise, in Israel or internationally, Rabin's government promptly (?, I think we remained quiet. Did not respond.)and publicly ruled out the idea of any negotiations.?)

The possibility that Amin was part of the planned hijack was practically non-existent. Thus, mMy second assumption, which would turn out to be wrong, was that however mercurial and bombastic Amin was, he would not actively want to support the murder of almost three hundreds of hostages from a French airliner, a few miles from his capital city. In other words, we assumed that if we *could* succeed in a sayeret-style raid – if we could surprise, and eliminate, the hijackers – and announced it, a fait a complit, Amin would allow either us or the French to bring in a civilian aircraft to take the passengers home.

So we focused on defeating the terrorists.

We knew (from the 'pregnant lady') we are dealing with four terrorists, and assumed probably there were another two, which remained 'dormant' through the operation. So, if we could bring 15-18 of The Unit or SEAL team fighters to the place and find a way to reach the old terminal, the mission, at this format, could be accomplished.

Most of the night was spent on thise central operational ~~logistical~~ **challenge: how to get a commando team** of around 15-18, to the doors of the old terminal at~~into~~ **Entebbe airport without being spotted.** We assumed ~~I did figure~~ **that some of Amin's troops might be stationed around the area.** But we assumed , based on the information at our disposal at the time, that they will basically have a passive role. Moreover,~~But~~ **Mookie insisted, from his experience in training them, that** even if that were not the case, **they wouldn't want to challenge us** ~~—~~**especially since we'd be mounting the operation at night.**

~~**He also drew on his experience at Jinja to suggest what would become a core part of our attack plan: to use a Hercules transport plane to land Sayeret Matkal troops, dressed in Ugandan uniforms, along with a pair of Jeeps and a shiny black Mercedes.** *Every* senior officer in Amin's army traveled that way, Mookie said.~~

We openly discussed a variety of options, rejecting some, based on technical shortages, and others on uncertainties regarding the risk of being identified before reaching the old terminal, without even knowing it.

_Muki, listening to Ido, describing what the Herculesses C-130s can do,He also drew on his experience at Jinja to suggest what would become a core part of our operational planattack plan: to use a Hercules transport plane to land Sayeret Matkal troops, dressed in Ugandan uniforms, along with three a pair ‘Ugandan”of Landrover Jeeps and a shiny black Mercedes. *Every* senior officer in Amin’s army traveled that way, Mookie said.

About an hour and half after we started, Salant showed up with dozens of still pictures from some inauguration ceremony in front of the old terminal. He even brought to my surprise and satisfaction, an 8mm film, some 5 minutes long, covering the ceremony, including the appearance at the start of it, of a black Mercedes , escorted by few light green Landrovers, a Mercedes from which a senior General got out and accepted the Misdar/Ceremony. It was by then ,that Muki added to his original thought of the two landrovers, the idea of adding a shiny black Mercedes instead of a third Landrover,to the force. *Every* senior officer in Amin’s army traveled that way. That ruse, we hoped, would allow us to arrive looking less like a rescue force, and more like the entourage of one of Amin’s Generals .

Salant also brought with him several air photos of the airport. Before the new terminal was built.~~Poring through hundreds of photographs we'd collected from Israelis who had worked in Uganda before the rupture in relations, we tried to narrow down our options into a series of potentially workable plans.~~

~~A couple, we dismissed as futile. We briefly thought of parachuting a team of Gadi's SEALs into Lake Victoria – until it emerged there were crocodiles prowling offshore. We also looked at the idea of using Nairobi airport in Kenya – a neighboring country with which we did have fairly good relations – as a jumping-off point to land a sayeret team by helicopter. But Ido pointed out that we had no experience of trying to load helicopters onto a Hercules.~~

We ended up with three alternatives, and an understanding that we will need~~agreement~~ to spend the next day doing whatever we could to get more information, and digging deeper into each of them. ~~–~~Two involved sneaking into the airport via the lake, but either ~~in~~ hired speed boats~~boats~~ from across the border in Kenya, or having SEALs parachute in with rubber dinghies. The third plan was the most elaborate and real, however it needed a landing on the main runway and driving to the old

terminal. At that stage it seemed to be at higher risk of being exposed.

~~, and was given further impetus when we watched an old, 8mm film of a military graduation ceremony at Entebbe Airport itself. It was Mookie's airborne motorcade. That ruse, we hoped, would allow us to arrive looking less like a rescue force, and more like the entourage of one of Amin's battalion commanders.~~

When I went to see Motta in the morning, he was not exactly thrilled. I think he had hoped for a detailed plan of action – (?< Motta was professional, he would not expect a full plan. Probably felt we don't have yet enough info to take decisions.)signed, sealed, delivered – for us to take to Shimon Peres. But as I went through the reasoning behind how we'd proceeded overnight, and outlined the potential advantages and pitfalls of each alternative plan, he became more receptive. The key to *any* operation succeeding, I kept emphasizing, was surprise. That required time and effort to get right.(We had seen the result when that part of a rescue attempt failed: in Ma'~~alot~~a lot). I assured him that within 24 hours, we would have a better idea of how to pull this off. I would be working directly with *Shayetet 13* to see if the idea of

parachuting rubber boats on to Lake Victoria would work. Mookie and Amiram would be following up the ~~other~~ Generals' convoy Idea– and trying to lay their hands on a Mercedes., and we will check with Mossad the feasibility of the third one.~~proposals~~ ~~– and trying to lay their hands on a Mercedes.~~

We saw Shimon around~~–~~ 830am~~mid-morning~~. In what would become a refrain throughout the crisis, he was both eager to hear that there was a plan,the details ~~–~~were less relevant for him~~of our plans~~,He teded to rely on us and was enthusiastic about the prospects for success. (EB. Not at this stage. Yes, he said, the mission we were contemplating involved challenges on a scale no Israeli military unit had yet attempted. But that, after all, was a hallmark of Sayeret Matkal. He was confident that spirit would win out in whatever course of action we proposed.EB. he just did not understand details and hoped we do.). Still, about the middle ~~near the end~~ of our discussion, he did plant what seemed to me a serious seed of doubt. He got a phone ,answered it, asked some questions. It turned out ~~told us~~ he'd got a friend of his, a retired Israeli colonel named Burka (Baruch Bar-Lev), who had befriended Amin while serving in Kampala, (to phone the Ugandan dictator.~~.~~ As Peres described the

outcome of their –talk, it was “unclear” exactly where Amin stood regarding the hijackers. Summary was we’d continue to work on developing the different ideas. Through this meeting Beni Peled, air force commander, raised he idea of sending a bigger force on 4 herculesses and take over the whole airport release the hostages and get them back. At this stage it was rejected based on the need to achieve surprise and the low chance of being able to do it in such a plan.

Few hours later, around noon timeWhile we’d been briefing Peres, the hostages’ ordeal took a chilling new turn – though also, we soon realized, a major boost to our hopes of getting them out alive. In an echo of the Nazis’ selection process in the concentration camps, the hijackers picked out all the passengers with Israeli passports, or Jewish names. The rest, they said, they were letting go. The first group boarded a special Air France flight out. Rabin sent his anti-terror adviser, Rechavam Ze’evi, to meet the flight in Paris, his mission was to prepare the ground for a possible negotiations.. And weI sent, half a day later Amiram Levin, armed with the architectural plans(?) of the airport, to get the maximum amount of detail on where the remaining captives

were being held. How they were guarded. By whom? And to look for any potential weak points we could exploit. We ordered him not to meet or talk to Ze'evi who was totally (?to check)out of the picture ,re possible operation

On a scrambled printer ~~phone~~ line Wednesday night,~~morning,~~ Amiram came up with more than we could have hoped for. One of the freed passengers was a French army veteran, not only willing but eager to help in what he must~~–~~surely have assumed was an effort to put together a rescue operation. One of the Jewish ladies with French passport (the grand mother of a future Sayeret officer),was a major source of detailed observations. ~~A main benefit of Amiram's debriefings was that~~ Through Amiram ww~~w~~e now validated the info~~knew~~ that the hostages were being held in the old airport terminal, about a mile from the new one that the Israelis had built. But the main benefit of Amiram's debriefings, ~~But most of the rest of the information,~~ though~~–~~ essential for the planning~~helpful in the long run~~, was bad news. The hijackers had placed explosives (? Were did we got ot?)around the terminal. Ugandan troops were actively cooperating, helping the terrorist to guard the old terminal area. There were also now at least six additional terrorists, who had joined

after the landing in Entebbe. That suggested that at the very least, Amin was tacitly supporting them.

And ~~Ugandan troops were helping to guard the airport terminal area.~~

t~~T~~his turned the plan for the operation on its head. (EB. Ned, should we repeat it? In reality,it didn't take even an hour to absorb the new info, and turn to the the combination of our General's convoy combined with Beni Peled idea of the four Herculesses.) My assumption had been that if we could deal quickly and surgically with the hijackers, getting the hostages out would be merely a question of Amin deciding whether El Al or Air France should bring them home. Now, we would have to overcome, or at least neutralize, Ugandan troops, and also take the hostages away safely. A commando team was never going to be able to accomplish that on its own. In any case, from my initial trial with the SEALs, it was looking as if we would need more work before trying to parachute rubber boats on to the lake. But the second of our ideas – using boats setting off from the Kenyan part of the lake – was also off the table. It was clear we needed a much larger force.

I did remain confident that the third of our options – the "motorcade" carried in a Hercules – could provide

the basis for the initial assault. Yet we were going to need at least one other transport plane, probably two, to accommodate the other forces needed to secure the area and deal with any Ugandan resistance. Plus a further plane so that, assuming the attack succeeded, we could treat the hostages for any medical conditions and fly them out.(EB. Ned , your version is more alive)It naturally called for combining our Generals' convoy idea and install it within a wider format, the like of which Beni Peled proposed on the morning meeting with Peres. It was at this stage that the Operations branch took the lead in preparing the GHQ level activity. Shay Tamary got Muki Ido and

aAn operation on this scale implied something else as well: that it would have to be put together by *katzhar*, the overall command of infantry and paratroopers. By Dan Shomron.

Dan was already partially in the loop, ~~of course~~.Two Members of his staff had been part of our planning sessions, from almost the beginning. He hardly knew ~~the~~ options we'd been working on. He had also knew ~~heard~~ of the~~an~~ idea that we'd only briefly considered, from Benny Peled and the air force: to go in with a large airborne force, at least four Hercules transports, and take over

the whole airport. It had seemed like overkill when it was first raised. Too risky, in terms of loosing surprise. Unnecessary, too, because at that point we were (?)counting/ assuming on the Ugandans are not part of it. (looking the other way). Now, if it was bolted on to the core sayeret force in its Mercedes motorcade, it seemed the one option that might work.

I was not at the meeting that formally made the rescue attempt a *katzhar* operation. I was not even at the *kirya*. I was in a ~~missile~~ boat off the coast of – AtlitHaifa, watching a second, and again unsuccessful, attempt by the SEALs to parachute into the sea with the rubber boats. But as soon as I was back at my desk on Thursday morning, Kuti called me in again. He said he had met with Dan and told him together with the Operations Branch to begin planning a multi-force landing at Entebbe, with the Sayeret Matkal motorcade spearheading the attack.

And Dan, according to Kuti, had made one request of his own. He had insisted I command the sayeret strike force.

* * *

In a lot of ways, that made sense. I had been at the center of the planning from the start. (sounds artificaial?)Though none of us had ever carried out an operation this complex or risky, I had led what was probably the closest equivalent: the attack on Black September in Beirut.(Self agrendizing?) Dan, when talking to Kuti, had emphasized he meant no disrespect to Yoni Netanyahu, as the current Sayeret Matkal commander. “But I know Ehud,” he said. “I’ve worked with him. I want him to lead it.”

Yoni was still in the Sinai. I had phoned him before our first overnight planning session, of course, and told him I was bringing in Mookie and Amiram to help. Mookie had spoken to him more oftendaily, (keeping him up to date as the situation, and our plans, kept changing, Ned, not sure he did. He told yoni I’ll call you if it gets hot.}. But the time for mounting the operation was growing perilously short. Ultimatum by the terrorists first set for Thursday, now moved to Saturday. Pressure had been building on Yitzhak Rabin, especially from the families of hostages who had now spent four days fearing for their lives. Initially, the hijackers had threatened to begin “executions” on Thursday. *Today*. That deadline had been pushed back. But only because Rabin felt he had no

realistic option but to drop (?) our refusal to consider negotiations with the terrorists. The hijackers had set a new, later, deadline. But it was for Sunday morning. Less than 72 hours away.

When Dan called a full ~~"order of battle"~~ briefing for commanders and staff of all forces, Thursday night, Mookie arranged to send a plane to bring Yoni back. The meeting was held at Beit Hatzanhan, a community center in the ~~north Tel Aviv~~ neighboring city ~~orhood~~ of Ramat GanAviv, a few minutes from the *kirya*. We knew we were entering unchartered territory. But Dan set out the plan in remarkable detail, and with his customary quiet confidence. All four Hercules would take off on Saturday evening from Sharm el-Sheikh, at the bottom end of the Sinai, to cut the flying distance at least slightly. They would attempt, and hope, to evade detection by Egyptian, Saudi or Sudanese radar on the way to Uganda. The first plane would land on what we presumed would be a completely dark runway, near the new airport terminal. Inside would be a small unit of paratroopers, our Sayeret Matkal strike force, two Jeeps and a Mercedes. The paratroopers would place lights along the runway to ease the arrival of the three other planes.

If all went to plan, the next Hercules wouldn't arrive for another 710 minutes or so – the most important 10 minutes of the entire operation. That was when our motorcade would make its way to the old terminal, and we would burst in and take care of the terrorists. The second Hercules would bring in another sayeret squad, with the job of reinforcing the attack unit and securing the perimeter of the old terminal. Hercules Number Three, a minute later, would carry a force made up of sayeret fighters, paratroopers and a Golani Brigade unit. Their task would be to secure the new terminal and the rest of the airport, and take care of any Ugandan military resistance. The final plane was essentially a flying medical unit (?), to provide treatment for the hostages and carry them back to Israel.

Yoni arrived just as Dan was finishing the presentation. He looked, as he so often did in the run-up to an major military operation, laser-focused, energized, eager to play his part. I realized then that it was critically important to explain to him the decision to place me in command. And that, despite our close personal relationship, it would be a difficult and delicate task. We spoke only briefly before he and Mookie drove to Kav(?) Chamesh to begin more detailed planning. Yoni was

intent that he, as sayeret commander, should lead the unit in. I told him I understood his frustration, but that for a variety of reasons, Dan wanted me to take the lead. Much of the planning had been done in Yoni's absence. We were only 2 days away from going in. I also stressed my determination to make a ganuine best effort not ~~sure that I did nothing~~ to detract from his authority, ~~role~~ as commander of the sayeret. I would command the force, but he will lead his people at the assaulting unit with my minimal intervention. I also told him to go into detailed planning with Muki, choosing the people and officers to participate,decide their roles, and set the time-line for training and briefing as well as logistics. ~~*guide* the attack, but he would still be in command.~~ I could tell he was still not satisfied. I told him and Muki that I will come later that night to the Unit to go with them over whatever they've done.~~But~~ Ww~~w~~e agreed to talk further before the next full briefing ~~planning~~ meeting, which Dan had set for nine o'clock Friday morning at – Sirkin base with all participants.~~Kav Chamesh~~.

As he and Mookie set off for Sirkin, I joined Dan, Motta and Kuti to go and see Rabin in the office he used when he was at the *kirya*. When we arrived, Peres was there too. So was Yitzhak "H~~Ch~~aka" Hofi. He had been head of

the northern command at the start of 1973 war, but was now director of the Mossad. Head of Intelligence and few others. But it was the Prime Minister who, ultimately, would have to approve any rescue operation. Rabin had called the meeting so we could tell him in detail about how we planned to get to Entebbe, and get the captives out. I had met him, by this stage, on a number of occasions, in a number of settings. ~~But~~ I had never seen him under such pressure, or confronting a challenge with such high stakes, but he seemed to be very cold headed and balanced].

[EB. That's for other place.Probably Oslo.(The atmosphere in the room was further charged by Peres's presence. His political and personal rivalry with Rabin was known to any Israeli with even a glancing interest in the country's politics. In other words, to pretty much all Israelis. But the tension between them now had to do only partly with politics Till here.EB.

There was a difference of attitude and mood between Peres and Rabin at this meeting. Peres would later say that, as Defence Minister, he was a crucial voice in deciding to go ahead with the rescue mission. Shimon is right about that. Nor do I doubt that his support for military action was genuine and heartfelt. But his

position was easier than Yitzhak’s. One reason was simple: he lacked Rabin’s hands-on command experience, and his grasp not just of the principle but the details of what we were proposing to do. But politically, too, Peres knew that if the operation failed, or simply wasn’t attempted, it would be Rabin who would bear the final responsibility, and get the blame.

Even under the best of circumstances, Rabin was cautious. He was a natural skeptic, determined to run through everything that might go wrong with an operation before approving it. I’d learned that the first time during my meeting with him and the technological department scientists way back in 1967, before going off to try to defuse the explosive charge in our T-junction near Jabal Libni. Now, as then, he seemed to assume that the worst, or at least the next-to-worst, was always bound to happen.

But he was also under back-breaking pressure. Part of this was obvious, from the open appeals from the hostages’ families to do something, anything, but just not let them die. But I later discovered that one of the most influential scientists/ Engineers in Israel, Yosef Tulipman, the head of our nuclear reactor facility in Dimona, had a daughter among the passengers. Like

Yitzhak, he had been a Palmachnik, and he came to see the Prime Minister in private. He told Rabin: “I demand one thing only: do not go on any adventures. Do not play with the lives of these people, with the life of my daughter.”

After Entebbe, there would be suggestions that Rabin’s readiness ~~U-turn on refusing~~ to negotiate with the terrorists had been a trick. That, as with the Sabena operation, he’d always intended to attempt a rescue operation and wanted to buy time, and lure the hijackers into a false sense of self-confidence. But the praxis was that he set Ze’evi to deal with it and his message, all along these days and to us that night was clear, and I have no doubt it was what he honestly felt. He said that if there *was* a military option, with a reasonable chance of success, he would approve it. But if not, he would negotiate. He – and we, as a country – could not let dozens of our citizens be murdered if by talking, or even deal-making, we could have saved them.

He turned to Dan and asked him whether there indeed was such an option, with a reasonable prospect of working. Dan said yes. (Rabin turned to me next, since I was going to be charge of the attack force, and I said I agreed with Dan). We had a plan, and we felt we could make it work. Motta said yes a bit more hesitantly,

suggesting we couldn't know for sure until we'd tested key parts of the operation. But for Rabin, it seemed to me, Dan's was the key voice. So he said, OK. He was approving it. *In principle*. He allowed us to continue the preparations.

Before approving it in fact, however, he told us he would need answers to two questions. . He said he needed confirmation, before takeoff from Sharm al-Sheikh, [EB.Rabin did it.[EB. Ned, it was Rabin on both. He ordered Haka later to take care of these two issues.EB] He turned to Chaka, with whom he'd clearly discussed it beforehand,(and the Mossad director took (?)over). He said they needed to know, first,)

whether it was physically possible to cross from the new runway at Entebbe to the old terminal area. Rabin was right: that was essential. We were going to land on the new runway, after all. If in the modernization work on the airport a retaining wall, or a new drainage trench, had been added, the underlying assumption of our surprise attack could be fatally undermined. And we did not and could not~~hadn't~~ even check it~~ed~~. But the question was serious.(–Rabin's~~Chaka~~'s question struck (?)(Ned, these were legitimate questions)me as a reminder of how much more fraught (?)this mission was than the dozens I'd led

in the sayeret, which we would plan and rehearse for weeks, sometimes months.)

Rabin moved on to ~~interrupted with~~ the second condition~~. He said he needed confirmation, before takeoff from Sharm al-Sheikh,~~ that when the airplanes will be coming closer to landing, the hostages were still in the old terminal. I knew why that troubled him, from a remark I'd heard him make a few years earlier when describing an American hostage-rescue raid deep behind enemy lines in North Vietnam. The operation went exactly as planned. There was just one problem: the American POWs had been moved.

(As) BEFORE we were leaving, he turned to the Mossad chief and said: "H~~Ch~~aka, you're responsible for getting me the answers." And to us: "(Ned, in the Israeli culture, when things get really tough, there is no drama, and no bravado.) " continue to work on it. But remember, ~~You should know, every one of you.~~ I will not approve this if I don't get confirmation."

That part was out of my hands. Or at least at the time, I assumed that it was. I drove to Kav Chamesh to get started on our part of the operation. I ran through with Yoni and Mookie how the attack would work, who would lead each of the teams tasked with the assault on the old

terminal, what equipment we needed, and how we would simulate and practice each stage. Mookie already had some of his men building a model of the terminal, with swathes of canvas for the interior walls. But we spent a good part of the meeting on the few minutes that would come right after we landed: the rolling out of the vehicles, the drive from the plane to the old terminal, and (?, most important ?of all), how to handle the possibility we might meet Ugandan soldiers on the way.

Mookie was adamant: even if we did; even if the Ugandan troops were armed; even if they were pointing their guns at us; *even if they shouted at us to stop*, they "wouldn't dare open fire on a Mercedes." I trusted his experience. I also kept emphasizing that we had to go in with the mindset to avoid engaging the Ugandans unless absolutely forced to do so. We had to remember the real aim of our mission was to reach the old terminal as quickly and unobtrusively as possible. If it did prove absolutely necessary to confront Ugandan soldiers, I said, we'd use only our sidearms – small, silenced Beretta pistols – until we were into the old terminal and taking on the terrorists. I told Yoni we needed to organize a separate training session in which each member of the team, riding in Jeeps, would have to hit a

cardboard target on either side, with a light bulb to simulate the heart. (We couldn't go into Entebbe with confidence, I said, until each of them could hit the light bulb with the silenced pistols).

Finally, I raised what seemed to me another critical condition for pulling off the operation. We couldn't know precisely where we might run into Ugandan soldiers, or how many. But there was one thing we could be absolutely sure of. "There *will* be some armed presence in the control tower," I said, and we needed to designate a special unit, four ~~three~~ guys, whose sole job would be to deal with it, with a machine gun or two, their automatic rifles and grenade-launchers trained on the tower as soon as we got off the plane. "The *moment* we lose the element of surprise, they need to open fire."

It was after midnight when I left Sirkin for home. Yoni began writing a detailed operational plan. He showed no signs of fatigue, nor, I was relieved to see, of lingering resentment over Dan's decision to put me in overall command. Mookie rushed off to begin training sessions with the attack units. We agreed to meet again, to ensure everything was on track, right after Dan's full operational briefing at nine the next morning.

The briefing was held in the same cavernous hall in Sirkin that I'd used four years earlier to simulate a Syrian officers club near Damascus. It was –in the now deserted old officers school, now been moved to the Negev, ~~off to the side of Kav Chamesh. But like a number of other buildings on the old RAF base, it had essentially become sayeret property. When I started in the unit, we had only our own small corner.Most of the base was being used for the officers' training course. But the course had now been moved to the Negev, so the sayeret had considerably more breathing room.~~

Dan began his presentation with a stage-by-stage review of how the operation would unfold, stressing the need for us to compress what would ordinarily be days or weeks of preparation into a window of mere hours. He was getting to the detail of stage-one – the motorcade attack – when I felt one of the young sayeret officers tap me on the shoulder. The deputy chief-of-staff had phoned, he said, to say that I was to go see Kuti at the *kirya*. "They said for you to do it immediately," the officer added. "And not discuss it with anyone. Just to tell Dan Shomron you've been taken out of the operation."

To say I was surprised would be an understatement. But I allowed myself to believe that the decision to

“take me out” of the rescue mission was, if not some misunderstanding or mistake, something that could still be reversed. The soldier in me – the Ehud Barak in me, perhaps – did very much want to command the critical first part of the mission. But I also genuinely felt that I was best placed to ensure it succeeded. In fact, I thought the arrangement Dan had wanted was best for Yoni as well.

There was no officer in Sayeret Matkal with whom I had such a close, or deep, personal relationship. From the start, I saw in Yoni an extraordinary mix of qualities both as a soldier and as a human being. As a soldier, even more so as an officer, he was right out of Central Casting. With his thatch of dark hair, his confident physical bearing and disarming smile, he could have played himself in a Hollywood film. He had enormous courage on the battlefield. I’d seen it in sayeret operations. Others had seen it since. In the 1973 war, he led a sayeret force into hand-to-hand combat with Syrian commandos on the Golan. He also personally rescued Yossi Ben-Chanan – one of the returning reserve officers I’d run into at Lod Airport on the first day of the war – when Yossi lay stranded, and seriously wounded. A year later – with my encouragement – he took time out before

his anticipated appointment as sayeret commander to join an armored brigade in the north. There, he not only led, but rebuilt and inspired a battalion left almost in tatters from the war.

But there was more to Yoni as well. After his regular army service, in the paratroopers, he'd fought in the Six-Day War and had taken a bullet in his elbow on the Golan. As soon as the cast was off, he married his pre-war girlfriend, Tuti Goodman, and they had gone off to spend a year studying at Harvard. It was when they returned that he joined the sayeret, on Bibi's recommendation, and became responsible for the training of the young cohorts, later my deputy. I used to marvel how at the end of 164 hours of hard training, he could spend a further two ~~three or four~~ reading history, or a novel, or poetry. Sometimes, writing (?)poetry as well. But that was an essential part of who he was: a young man, still in his twenties, torn between the impulse to devote his life to defending, and fighting for, Israel; and to study and read and write and be a more "normal" family man.

That struggle was tough for him. Both as my deputy and in the years since, it had often left him feeling sad and, sometimes, alone. Tuti understood intellectually what drew her husband to a life in uniform. His sense of

patriotism and of history, no doubt reinforced by the example of his and Bibi's formidable father. His urge for, and fulfillment from, a life of exertion and action. And the drive to lead others. But that was not what she had signed up for. I know that neither of them wanted to split up, but both found it difficult to confront the central issue. Yoni, at one point, asked me to speak to Tuti. She asked me to speak to Yoni. I did my best to explain each to the other. But even though I doubt I was the ideal choice for a marriage counselor, I think the gap between what each of them wanted for their lives was too wide to be bridged. The marriage began to fray – even more so after Tuti had a difficult pregnancy. Their tiny daughter was delivered at(?) six months. She survived only a couple days.

By the time(?) the 1973 war broke out, they had separated. After the war, when Yoni took over the tank battalion in the north, he was feeling professionally fulfilled, but personally shattered. Hearing that I'd found a new apartment in Ramat Hasharon, he called to see whether there were other flats available in the building. I said I was afraid they were all gone. When I'd found ours, I was told there was only one, second-floor apartment left. But I told him I'd try. It turned out

that the owner of one of the first-floor flats, directly below ours, was willing to rent it out. Yoni snapped it up, and we became not just comrades in arms, or friends, but neighbors.

Especially over the past year or so, with Yoni at Kav Chamesh and me in the *kirya*, we'd seen more ~~a lot~~ of one another. And for the first time in years, he seemed, if not happy, a lot closer to a sense of personal peace than at any time since I'd known him. A big reason for this was a young woman named Bruria Shaked, his girlfriend. She was younger than Yoni, by nearly a decade. She had been doing her military service as a ~~the~~ secretary in his tank battalion when they met. In his final months there, their friendship became something much deeper. In many ways, she was his opposite. Yoni came from a comfortable background. His father may have felt shunned for his Jabotinskyite past, and effectively forced to carve out a career in America. But he was indisputably a serious and accomplished academic. Bruria came from a much more modest family. But while he was a thinker and a brooder and in many ways a loner, someone who found the everyday social side of friendship difficult to navigate, Bruria was outgoing, playful, funny. Full of life. She also sensed *his* need for a shoulder to lean on, a hand to hold

at the (?)movies or a Saturday stroll on the beach. A (?)cocoon. They were perfect for each other. They made the apartment a real home. The shelves creaked under the weight of Yoni's books. There was a rocking chair in the living room ~~.~~and a big shepherds dog. Often on a Saturday, when Nava and I dropped in, he would be sitting, puffing on his pipe, reading. An old 33 rpm record would be playing on the stereo. And smiling.

But outside of this domestic haven, he still struggled. He seemed troubled by some of the very qualities that had always made him so special. He had looked forward to taking command of Sayeret Matkal. As a fighter, he arrived not only with the standing earned by his own record in the unit, but by the valor and leadership he'd shown on the Golan. So respect was never at issue. But on a personal level, there was a distance, a dissonance, between him and those he now led.

(?).Not accurate enough.From the very first days of the unit, sayeret training exercises had been notoriously tough. Yoni earned admiration for not only leading, but participating, in the most difficult of them. But just as he pushed himself to his outer physical limits, he now insisted on seeing the same drive in others. It grated (?)on some of them.Till here.).

And there was also an inevitable distance between these more typically Israeli youngsters and the aloof, reflective, intellectual side of their commander. There was a simmering criticism of Yoni among the Sayeret officers. Stemming from differences in style and several occurences(?) during some of the operations, which left officers uneasy.He was aware of this divide, and of the rumblings of criticism and discontent from some in the unit. Being Yoni,(?) that only made him more determined to push himself, and others, harder. To make his command a success.

And it *was, in many ways*.Not all. As I would sometimes tell him, every sayeret commander, every human being, was different. Yoni had strengths that others, myself included, did not. Still, as we now prepared for Entebbe – a do-or-die mission not just for us, but for the terrified passengers we hoped to rescue – I did wonder whether the undercurrent of uneasiness in the unit might prove an additional problem that wasn't worth the risk. I never shared this worry with Dan, or with anyone. But I did feel that having me [EB. Ned, it might be read as a self serving, rather than objective criricism.EB.]

as a kind of umbrella commander would take unnecessary weight off everyone, Yoni included, and allow us to focus only on getting the job done.

I phoned Kuti from a nearby~~the sayeret~~ office. But when I tried to persuade him to stick with the original plan, he was adamant. “You know I wouldn’t tell you to come here if it wasn’t important,” he said. “Ehud, Leave immediately. Tell Dan to pass the command to Yoni. You have another assignment.” I made one final attempt to talk him out of it, but I could sense it was pointless. I went back to the briefing. I told Dan I’d been summoned by Kuti. Still holding out a glimmer of hope, I did tell him I would try my best to return. But that if I wasn’t back soon, he should put Yoni in charge.

Kuti was at the gate (?)when I arrived at the *kirya*. He obviously had neither the interest, nor time, to reopen the issue of my commanding the operation. “Get ready to fly to Nairobi,” he said. I had indeed been re-assigned: to accompany a Mossad team, with two and half separate tasks. The first was to get the answers to the questions Rabin had asked us the night before. Then, assuming we could reassure the Prime Minister it was safe to go ahead with the rescue, we would have to arrange the Kenyans’ support in allowing us to set up a medical

facility for any injured soldiers or hostages, and to refuel the transport planes for the flight back to Israel. And just in case the whole operation fails to have a foot on the ground already deployed close to the arena for whatever might develop.

There was another aspect to the assignment as well. I was to act as the channel of communications from the Nairobi side of the operation to Kuti, who, as chief of operations, would be in overall command. While Dan would run things on the ground, he, along with Benny Peled, would be patrolling overhead in a Boeing 707.

The Nairobi tasks were obviously important. But I still couldn't help wondering: why me? I'm sure that a desire not to undermine Yoni entered into the change in plans. My hunch was that Avigdor "Yanosh" Ben-Gal, Kuti's own deputy in the *kirya,* had weighed in on Yoni's behalf. Yanosh had been head of the Seventh Brigade on the Golan, and was the general who had called in Yoni's team to rescue Yossi Ben-Chanan's battalion. But Motta, who as chief-of-staff had the ultimate say, may also have been swayed by my own boss in intelligence, Shlomo Gazit. As we were walking over to see Rabin the night before, Motta, typically direct, had said: "Shlomo thinks you shouldn't participate." The argument was that in my

current job, I was a repository of almost all Israel's intelligence secrets. I think Motta was persuaded on that score by my reply: that it was vanishingly unlikely I'd fall into hostile hands while leading the assault. In fact, I doubt that was Shlomo's main concern. I suspect his real worry was what would happen(EB. I have to find a way to make it more subtle.) if I was killed. The last thing he wanted to do, so soon after having to explain to Uzi Yairi's wife that one of his desk officers had been killed in action, was to have to deliver the same message to Nava.

It was probably a mix of things that persuaded Motta – including the genuine need to ensure we got Rabin the information he wanted. Though I still didn't like the decision, I did understand the multiple layers of reasoning behind it. On the afternoon of Friday, July 2 – barely 24 hours before the Hercules were due to take off from Sharm – I found myself on a Boeing 707 without tail signs with a Mossad team on the way to Nairobi.

* * *

The Kenyans were not exactly friends or allies of Israel. But relations between President Jomo Kenyatta's

security services and the Mossad had been close for some years, and we'd built fairly good personal relations with several key government ministers. I flew in with three Mossad people: Uri Lubrani, Mike Harari and Nachum Admoni, who would go on to head the agency a few years later. They were all using assumed names, and suitably doctored documents, and insisted that I do the same. We travelled with a couple of other army officers as well, one from the paratroopers and another a communications specialist. They, and I, hoped their part in proceedings would be fairly minor. Because the main reason they were there was if the rescue operation failed. If that happened, the three of us would be expected to put together Plan B: to help get the force out of Entebbe via Kenya and, after refueling and any emergency medical treatment, back to Israel.

We set up base in the residence of the Mossad station chief in Nairobi. Uri Lubrani called on the now-aging President Kenyatta, while Admoni and I went to see the man who was effectively running the country and would succeed him a couple of years later, Vice-President Daniel arap Moi. But our main point of contact was the head of Kenya's equivalent of the Mossad. Since the secrecy of the mission had to be preserved, we couldn't

make advance preparations for refueling, or for the flying in an additional Boeing to serve as a field hospital if that proved necessary. But he smoothed the way for us to do both, without anyone asking too many questions.

Mike Harari – aka ~~or~~ Charlie, (as he was listed on his fake passport) – took the lead in arranging to get Rabin's questions answered. He got a local pilot he well knew, equipped with a camera (?and telephoto lens), to fly to Entebbe in a private plane, circle twice and, after he was cleared to land, to claim mechanical difficulties and head back out again. He made the flight early on Saturday. I had the up-to-date pictures of the airport by mid-morning. In my temporary persona as secret agent, I'd worked out a code before I left with Rabin's own intelligence officer. It was embarrassingly unsophisticated: we agreed to refer to the Prime Minister as "the father in law~~relative~~ (of Avraham)." Avraham was Rabin's son-in-law. I contacted the aide as soon as I had the photos. "The answer to the first question for the 'father in Law',~~from Avraham's relative,"~~ I said, "is positive." I've sent immediately the original photos with the Boeing 707 which brought us, back home. It reached Dan only on the runway, just before takeoff.

We still had to get a reply to the second question: to make sure the hostages were still where we thought they were. “Charlie” somehow enlisted a contact in Uganda, a nurse from Kampala who had visited them, to make two more visits, one in the late afternoon(?), Then, after the flight towards Entebbe already started (and again) around nine on Saturday night. So I was able to tell Avraham’s father-in-law that the question to his second question was also “yes”. And the father-in-law then gave the rescue mission – now dubbed Operation Thunderbolt – the green light to land in Entebbe.

When I was commander of Sayeret Matkal, I had found the rare occasions when I ran an operation from a command post, rather than in the field, immensely frustrating. This was even worse. Once we’d got word that the rescue force was airborne, AdmoniMike knew Ben Getty head of the local Service,and weI put the arrangements for refueling in place. The Israeli Boeing(?) outfitted as a mobile hospital had also landed. I knew that if all went well, the first Hercules would reach Entebbe between on eleven and midnight on Saturday. The operation, again assuming it went off without major problems, would take an hour-and-a-half at most. But all I could do now – from across Lake Victoria, 300 miles east – was to wait.

It was shortly (?)after midnight when the waiting was over. Kuti radioed me from his airborne control post to say the first of the Hercules had left Entebbe for Nairobi. His command plane, too, was now headed ~~–~~back towards Israel~~our way~~. I could finally exhale. Yet shortly before the planes were due to start arriving, he contacted me again. The connection was maddeningly unclear, so I strained to hear him. But he repeated the key part of his message to make sure I'd understand: I was to check, once the troops and hostages were on the ground, "the exact situation with people wounded or dead."

The Kenyans had given us access to a landing bay, with a security cordon around it. About quarter to one in the morning on July 4, the planes began their staggered arrival. When the Hercules carrying most of the sayeret force taxied to a halt, I was waiting to meet it. As the giant rear door lowered, Dan Shomron was the first person I saw. I registered the disturbed look ~~of shock~~ on his usually serene features, and sensed there was bad news before he told me. But it was even worse than I feared. "Ehud," he said, "Yoni's dead... We got the hostages out. But Yoni was killed." Embracing him, I said: "It's a terrible price to pay, for a great achievement." It was

in part to comfort and reassure Dan. But I meant what I said, both parts.

I saw two other old friends minutes later: Mookie, and Ephraim Sneh, a doctor attached to Battalion 890 of the paratroopers who had been with Itzik Mordechai ~~me~~ at the Chinese Farm. Both were obviously torn between a sense of accomplishment in having freed the hostages, and the blow of losing Yoni. On the flight in from Entebbe, Ephraim

(I think Yonathan Hassin, was the Dr. with The Unit)

had tried desperately, but in vain, to revive him.

I asked Ephraim to take me to see Yoni. The scene inside the Hercules, which was also carrying a number of the sayeret fighters, and most of the hostages, summed up the bittersweet ending to the ordeal. The mood among the men from the unit, in their Ugandan Army camouflage fatigues, was subdued. The hostages were, understandably, buoyant with relief at being free, and simply alive. Ephraim led me to a stretcher that was covered with a blanket. I peeled it back. Yoni’s handsome face had lost all its color. But as I touched his forehead, it was still warm. Almost as if the life inside him refused to depart.

I couldn't raise Kuti by radio~~, but his plane was due to land in Nairobi before long anyway~~. ~~–~~I entered the office of Nairobi Airport head and called~~But~~ ~~I~~ called Motta on an international line.~~to make sure he was informed~~: ‘all the terrorists had apparently been killed, I told him. Sadly, one(three?) of the hostages as well, as well as several wounded. And Yoni Netanyahu was dead. ‘Are you Sure?’ Motta asked. “I’ve seen him” I answered. ”Great achievement. Heavy price” I told him as well. I could here a sigh on the other side of the line.

Before the planes began taking off for Israel, ~~I asked Ephraim to take me to see Yoni. The scene inside the Hercules, which was also carrying a number of the sayeret fighters, and most of the hostages, summed up the bittersweet ending to the ordeal. The mood among the men from the unit, in their Ugandan Army camouflage fatigues, was subdued. The hostages were, understandably, buoyant with relief at being free, and simply alive. Ephraim led me to a stretcher that was covered with a blanket. I peeled it back. Yoni’s handsome face had lost all its color. But as I touched his cheek, it was still warm. Almost as if the life inside him refused to depart.~~

I made one other phone call. It was to Nava, in Ramat Hasharon. She was asleep, of course. I told her that the

operation to free the hostages had succeeded. “But Yoni is dead.” I could hear her gasp. “Listen,” I said, “you have to go downstairs. Tell Bruria. Before some army liaison officer shows up at her door. Tell her. And stay with her.” At first, she seemed not so much unwilling as unable to do it. “How *can* I?” she said, crying. “What can I *tell* her?” I said I knew how hard it would be, but that we needed to make sure Bruria heard the news from a friend. A friend to both her and to Yoni. Later, Nava told me she’d waited several hours, not wanting to make things even worse by waking Bruria in the middle of the night. But at daybreak, she did go down. She told Bruria. She stayed with her, talked with her, held her, during those first few awful hours.

Along with the rest of the “Kenya team”, I had to remain in Nairobi for several more days. While most of the injuries to the hostages and soldiers were minor enough to be treated on the way back to Israel, we arranged to have several more seriously wounded hostages taken to the best, and nearest, local hospital. In addition to acting as a liaison between them and their families back home, we would be on hand to help co-ordinate Israel’s response to any possible fallout(?) from the rescue mission.

In the end, the main repercussion occurred not in Kenya, but Uganda, and we were powerless to do anything about it. Amin unleashed a campaign of killings: against soldiers or(?) airport staff at Entebbe airport; ethnic Kenyans in the border area; and one of the original Entebbe hostages, a 74-year-old woman with dual Israeli and British citizenship, named Dora Bloch. Though our rescue force didn't know this, Mrs Bloch had got a piece of food stuck in her throat earlier in the week and had been taken to a Kampala hospital. After the rescue, two of Amin's soldiers dragged her from her bed and murdered her. And two years later, there was a final act of savagery, only months before Amin was overthrown and forced into exile: the assassination of Kenya's then-minister of agriculture,(?) a former security adviser to Jomo Kenyatta.

Alongside the sadness over Yoni's death, and the many public tributes to him, the prevailing mood back in Israel was of celebration, even joy, at the success of the most audacious hostage-rescue ever attempted, and the return of 102 passengers and crew to their homes and family. I was still in Kenya when Rabin and Peres welcomed the returning aircraft. To my greater frustration, I was also unable to join the gathering of

hundreds on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem for Yoni's funeral. Or to hear Shimon Peres praise him in terms I knew must have filled (?)his parents, and Bibi too, with pride: "one of Israel's finest sons, one of its most courageous warriors, one of its most promising commanders."

In Judaism, however, there is a series of defined stages of mourning. At the end of the first thirty days – the *shloshim* – Yoni's parents held a commemorative gathering in Jerusalem, and asked me to be among the people to speak.

Since my return from Nairobi, I'd spent days thinking about Yoni, how he'd lived, and how he died. I found his loss even more upsetting when I learned, from Mookie and others in the rescue team, how it had happened. As the sayeret motorcade had begun making its way from the Hercules to the terminal, with Mookie and Yoni in the lead Mercedes, two Ugandan soldiers had spotted them. One of the Ugandans raised his rifle. Rather than risk relying on Mookie's assurances that he'd never actually firing, Yoni and another soldier in the Merecedes had shot him, with their silenced Berettas. But they had wounded, not killed him. As they drove on, he got(?) back to his feet, and raised his gun again. One of our soldiers in the Jeep behind them then killed him – with

his *un-silenced* automatic rifle. Now that all surprise was gone, the attack teams abandoned their vehicles and ran towards the terminal. Barely~~rely~~ a minute later, Yoni fell to the ground. He had been shot. From the airport control tower.

However successful the eventual outcome, the crucial first stage of the attack had not only gone wrong. It had gone wrong in exactly the way we'd discussed in that first night's planning meeting – me, Yoni and Mookie – in Kav Chamesh. Instead of ignoring the Ugandans, they'd opened fire. And once any hope of surprising the terrorists was gone, they *not* opened(? To check) fire on the control tower. I did not waste time wondering whether if I'd still be in command, things might have ended differently, and Yoni might still be alive. I hoped so, of course. But to entertain such thoughts seemed to me profoundly unfair to Yoni. I had now spent more than a decade as a soldier, officer and commander. If I'd learned one thing, it was that even in the most well-planned, well-led, operations, there was always the danger that something would go wrong.

[EB. Ned, I find it artificial, for a mman of action to spend 1300 words on describing how he came to make an eulogy. I think better to translate part of it , and add

almost nothing.EB]I spoke for less than five minutes at the commemoration ceremony, without notes, but not without preparation. (Over a period of weeks, I'd been writing down random thoughts, snippets of a conversation I kept having with myself. About what Yoni had done in his short life, of course, but also the beautifully complicated man he was. About the tragedy of his early death, but also the way in which all of us now had to draw meaning, value, and ideally something of permanence from the feelings of pain and loss. I also spent time working out how to square what I felt I needed and wanted to say, with what many in the audience, certainly Yoni's parents and Bibi, would expect me to say. Not only was Yoni being mourned after Entebbe. He was – in the spirit of Shimon's words at the funeral – being elevated to something approaching the Jewish equivalent of sainthood. I did not want to detract from his evolving status as national hero. But I did want to find a way of capturing Yoni as he really was: a brave man, an extraordinary fighter and officer. But also a man sometimes feeling torn inside, and on his own.

I began with words of ancient rabbinic wisdom about the path which all of us travel from birth, to death, and to whatever comes after. I know this may seem odd, coming

from a non-observant son of Mishmar Hasharon. But even among secular Israelis, especially in times of shared sadness or celebration, the echoes of ancient Hebrew and Aramaic are shared and understood. The quotation I chose – from the 2,000-year-old volume known as *Pirkei Avot*, or the *Ethics of our Fathers* – seemed somehow right. Not just for the occasion, but as a way into what I wanted to say: "Know where you came from – a putrid drop... Know where you are going – to a place of dust, maggots and worms... And know before whom you are destined to give your final account, the King of Kings."

I spoke of the loss of Yoni, one more victim of death's arbitrary tyranny on the battlefield, and said it was impossible not to think about the meaning of what lay between the "putrid drop" where each of us begins our life and our final reckoning. It was a question without a simple answer. Probably, without a single answer. But, I said, "I believe that life is not just a sum of the hours and days between the beginning and the end. It is the *content* we pour into the space in between... The imprint a person leaves on other human beings through who he is and what he does. And the imprint, through his openness and sensitivity to every shade of everything around him, that the world leaves on him."

I had known people who were given the gift of a long life but who, by that definition, had hardly lived at all. But there were also people like Yoni. He had lived only briefly. But he had learned and loved. Fought, and educated others to fight. Grappled with the most profound puzzles of existence. And yet was also open “to the wonders of a smile. A journey. A flower. A poem.” If there was any consolation for a life cut off at the age of 30, I said, that was it.

Everyone in the hall had fallen quiet. But I wondered whether the metaphor I now grasped for to look beyond mere consolation, to search for meaning, might end up distracting them from what I hoped to say. It didn’t. And as I’d struggled to put Yoni’s death in a wider context, it seemed to me exactly apt. I spoke of the human skeleton, the lattice on which our bodies are built. As scientists told us, it was not composed mainly of living organisms, but of cells that had already died. “For each cell, death is simply the end of its life,” I said. “But for the whole organism, the death of individual cells is an inseparable part of *life.*”

“A nation is, in a sense, a living organism,” I said. “The death of its sons, however painful, is inseparable from – essential to – its life and its staying power.”

And there was also a crucial difference between a cell and human being: *choice*. “Our Yoni made his choice: to belong to the family of fighters. He made it, fully aware, fully knowledgable, about the price he might have to pay.” That, of course, made *our* situation no less painful. As Israelis, we’d long had to face the loss of our best sons. Not just fighters or officers who might potentially have risen to command whole divisions. Also future poets. Authors. Thinkers. Scientists. None of these individuals was irreplaceable *functionally*. Others would take their places. “But *no one*, however exceptional, can replace the impact they might have made had they gone on living.”

Yoni’s choice had been to become part of a millennia-long history: from the ancient temple, through exile, the Holocaust, the birth of Israel, and the triumphs and trials in the years since. Too often, I said, we were inclined to forget that throughout this history – “from Yonatan, the son of King Saul, through Yonatan the Maccabee; to *our Yonatan* – our survival had rested on “the sword in the hands of a very few of our sons, and on their readiness to grasp that sword, to bear its heavy weight.”

Yoni had been part of that.

Still, I wanted to end by remembering that he was also more, much more, than a young Israeli who had fought and sacrificed and died.

“Our Yoni... We have seen him torn between his passion for knowledge on the one hand, and the sense of mission and of personal fulfillment that he found in uniform. There was the Yoni of history and philosophy books: Platon and Marks. Who saw the history of Israel not just as a compendium of facts, but a source of inspiration, and a call for action. The Yoni who rebuilt a tank battalion reduced to ashes and dust on the Golan. And there was the Yoni at peace. Tranquil. At home. With his pipe and his phonograph records, out of uniform.

“We saw him in his hours of supreme achievement and satisfaction. We saw him, too, sometimes standing alone, with pain in his heart, biting his teeth, carrying the heavy, lonely burden of commanding the very fighters who he was leading when he fell.

“We have seen him on the battlefield, engaging the enemy, heading into a test of fire with courage and wisdom and his indomitable spirit – the very essence of the spirit that made possible the operation in which he would lose his life.” Because, make no mistake, I said: beyond the weapons used, the people who participated, the

training and exercises before the fleet of Hercules had taken off; beyond the fine balance required in the planning, execution, and decision-making; it was this spirit, this essence, that was tested at Entebbe."

I ended by saying what we all knew to be true. Yoni, the man, was gone. We could not bring him back to life. "But his warmth, his hunger for knowledge, his certainty in the justice of our journey as a country and his readiness to throw himself into affecting its course. All of this, we now had the power to aspire to in ourselves, and to pass on to those who follow us. "Should we fail to live up to this challenge, we will be betraying the most important imperative from Yoni's death. If we *can* live up to it, we will be building a monument to him more beautiful than anything we might shape in stone."Till here.EB.]

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There was a postscript. When I saw Yoni's family afterwards – before Bibi, who was in a masters program at MIT, returned to Boston – they were still bleeding inside from their loss. Especially[EB.sounds simplistic)] because the father still carried the sense of unfairness

at his post-1948 exclusion from Israel's academic mainstream, they were incredibly close as a family. In fact, not only did Bibi bring Yoni into the unit when I was there. The youngest son, Ido, also served under me for a brief time. Yoni was not only loved in this family universe. In many ways, he was the polestar, certainly for the other boys.

I am sure the deep wound of losing him affected their uneasiness about his relationship with Bruria. Even before they'd met each other, Yoni had told me how hard his parents were finding his separation from Tutti. Bruria was, of course, at the funeral, and the *shloshim* commemoration as well. But she did not sit with the family. I think that with the shock of his death at Entebbe, mixed with the pride they felt at his emergence as a national hero, they simply found it difficult to include Bruria in the picture. I guess it was not surprising that, with everything else surrounding Yoni's death, they found it especially hard to hear references to his young girlfriend as, in some sense, his widow.

Some weeks later, I was asked to see the Netanyahu family's lawyer, Erwin Shimron. It was an odd, slightly rambling, conversation. But he seemed to feel that, as her and Yoni's neighbor and friend, I was somehow

encouraging the idea that Bruria was part of the circle of the bereaved. The gist of what he asked was for me to withdraw whatever mantle of protection or encouragement I might be providing, and instead to help disentangle the link with Yoni and his legacy. I saw no point in getting into an argument with him. I think I sensed that it would take time for the grief felt by each of those closest to Yoni to heal, but that this particular issue would resolve itself. I saw even less point, however, in leading the lawyer to believe that I either would, or could, do what he was suggesting.

“Mr Shimron,” I said. “I knew Yoni. I know his parents. I know Bruria. I do not know you. But I have a musical ear. And I don’t like the undertone I hear in what you’ve been saying... Bruria gave Yoni, at a critical time in his life, more warmth than he received from any creature on earth.”

Time, gradually, did allow all of us in the constellation around Yoni to move on. But there was another, more immediate, postscript for me as well. When I’d spoken at the gathering in Jerusalem, I never expected my words to have an impact beyond the audience I most meant them for: Bibi, his and Yoni’s parents; our shared sayeret comrades and friends; Bruria, too. Yet the

following morning in *Davar*, Chaim Goori, the Palmachnik poet who had visited me in the Sinai after the war, wrote that for the first time in years, he had heard the "true voice of the Land of Israel" in my eulogy. He even added that in "Officer A.B." – since military censorship rules prevented newspapers from naming a former Sayeret Matkal commander – he had seen a future Israeli Prime Minister. I did not take that part seriously. It would be years before I took any real interest in politics, and years after that before I contemplated the idea of public office. But I do remember reflecting, after reading Chaim's column, about the *power of words*. At moments of high emotional arouse or high attention. I'd always dismissed that. I told myself it was *actions* that mattered. Now, it struck me that if the words were self-evidently from the heart, at a time and a place where people's ears and minds were open, they could sometimes have extraordinary impact.

In this case, they also changed(overexaggaration) the direction of my career again. For one thing, they healed the effect of some earlier words I'd spoken, equally heartfelt if perhaps less well judged: to the two generals in Motta's office who had told me that I was not "ready" to command a tank brigade. Moussa Peled, who had

been one of them, was at the memorial ceremony for Yoni. So was Motta. The following day, both made a point of telling me how moved they were by what I'd said. Afterwards, it was as if Moussa had forgotten, or maybe just forgiven, my earlier show of defiance. And Motta, for whom such defiance was never an issue, soo(he wouldn't give it BECAUSE of any words.EB)n gave me a new role which turned out to restart my path up the ranks of the officers' corps.